

Grammar notes: habits

[Present simple](#)

To talk about habits, the present simple is generally used with an adverb of frequency (always, never, sometimes, usually...) which normally comes before the main verb but after the verb 'to be'. For example:

He always **goes** to work by bus.
She **is** usually late.
I never **go** to clubs. I don't like them.

[Present continuous](#)

The present continuous is used with the adverb 'always' to describe actions that are repeated and repeated. Grammar books sometimes say it refers only to irritating habits, but this isn't true. For example:

She's always **cleaning** the house, even when it's not necessary.
I'm not surprised he hasn't got any money. He's always **buying** people presents.
They're always **trying** to cadge cigarettes off people.
He must be a happy person. He's always **smiling**.

[Will](#)

Will does not refer to the future here, but is used to talk about predictable or characteristic behaviour, in other words what you expect people to do.

It's generally used as 'll, because when you use the whole word it means you find it irritating. For example:

He **won't** usually speak to us at breakfast time but he'll come to the pub with us in the evenings.
When he comes in from work he'll just sit in front of the telly.
He **will** put his cigarettes out on his plate. I wish he wouldn't.

[Past simple](#)

The past simple can be used to talk about habits as long as you make the context clear or use adverbs referring to time. For example:

When I went to school I **had** to wear uniform.
Every morning I **worked** for a few hours and then **had** lunch.
I never **got up** before twelve when I was unemployed.

[Past continuous](#)

This can be used in the same way as the present continuous, but to refer to the past:

She **was** always **cleaning** the house, even when it wasn't necessary.
I'm not surprised he didn't have any money. He **was** always **buying** people presents.
They **were** always **trying** to cadge cigarettes off people.
He must have been a happy person. He **was** always **smiling**.

Used to

Structure: **used to do** something/**didn't use to do** something

This form is used to describe actions and states which are no longer true, in other words they are true for the past but not for the present. For example:

We **used to go** to the Lake District every year for our holidays.

When I was living abroad I **used to swim** every day before breakfast.

My family **used to be** rich.

We **used to have** lots of servants.

There is no present form of 'used to'. You have to use 'usually' and the present simple. It isn't exactly the same as the Spanish verb soler, although it's similar in the past.

Would

Would is used in the same way as 'used to', and is the past equivalent of 'will' for present habits. It is NOT used to describe states. For example:

We **would go** to the Lake District every year for our holidays.

When I was living abroad I **would swim** every day before breakfast.

My family **would be** rich.

We **would have** lots of servants.